

Factsheet for Families

Protecting Children from Inappropriate Media

Whether it's through newspapers, television, radio or the internet, information and graphic footage of local, national and world events is widely available. Children can easily be exposed to information and visual images that cause them to experience anxiety or fear.

Even very young children can be adversely affected by what they see or hear in the media. While younger children can become frightened or upset by scary, vivid images, older children can be frightened of threats or dangers that they perceive might happen to themselves, their friends or their families. Exposure to frightening events can cause children to feel unsafe and insecure, with short term effects including fear and crying and longer term effects including sleep problems, fear of being alone and fear of themselves or others being hurt or killed.

How can children be exposed to age inappropriate information reported in the media?

Children can be exposed to inappropriate or frightening information or images through media sources such as newspapers, magazines, television news casts, the radio, the internet, or by hearing others such as families or friends discussing disturbing news events.

It is important that families carefully consider how and when they want their child to begin to learn about the world and current affairs, and that they strive to support children's understanding and emotional wellbeing as they begin to access information from the media.

Minimising children's exposure to inappropriate media information

Families can reduce the potential for children to be exposed to inappropriate media reported events by:

- monitoring the content of television viewed by children
- monitoring children's use of the internet and teaching them safe internet usage
- keeping televisions and computers out of children's rooms
- supervising and managing their access to print media such as magazines and newspapers
- avoiding discussing inappropriate events around children
- avoiding demonstrating to children your fears about media reported events, and avoid overreacting to these in the presence of children

Strategies to support children after exposure to age inappropriate media information

- remove the source of exposure as quickly as possible, or remove the child from the source
- comfort and reassure the child that they are safe
- be sympathetic to the child's fears- acknowledge that their fears are real and are valid to the child
- try to divert younger children's attention to something they like, such as a special activity or favourite toy
- with older children, explain clearly, without belittling them, that the event is unlikely to happen to them
- seek professional help if you are concerned that your child's fears are continuing

Some useful resources:

About children and the media

Young Media Australia
(www.youngmedia.org.au)

About children's safe use of the internet

- www.nettysworld.com.au
- www.cybersmartkids.com.au

About television news programs developed for children

- the ABC *Behind the News (BTN)* program (www.abc.net.au/tv/btn/)
- the Network10 *the total news (ttn)* program (www.news.com.au/ttn/)